



MIT Hillel Update



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Greetings to Alumni, Parents, and Friends in Cambridge and Beyond...

Pictured Above:

1. Students learn to be advocates for Israel at the AIPAC Annual Conference. (Left to Right): Zev Bimstein '15, Marissa Feinman (Hillel staff), Jeff Sperling '15, Adam Eagle '16, Shoshana Gibbor (Hillel staff), Yoni Stoller '16
2. Dressing up for Purim Megillah Reading and Queen Esther's Ball: the crowd included Israeli Sloan students (above), graduate students, undergraduates - an incredibly diverse swath of campus
3. Reform Havurah freshmen prepare for Purim with hamentaschen baking. (Left to right): Megan Mansfield '16, Beth Cholst '16, Laura Standley '16

Mentshn of Mention



Keren Greenbaum '14
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I am Keren Greenbaum, a junior in course 7 (biology) originally from Teaneck, New Jersey.

I am one of those people who wanted to go to MIT since the seventh grade. After realizing how much I loved math and science, I asked my mom where a good place would be to go to college. "I guess MIT is good for that," she responded, probably not realizing it would stick in my head for the next 5 years. When it came down to deciding though, it was really the environment and the people that reeled me in. MIT is a one-of-a-kind university where everyone is nerdy, works together, and is super passionate about their goals, whatever they may be.

I originally came to Hillel because I was looking for a place to enjoy Jewish life on campus. I had been to Jewish day school all my life, grown

Executive Director's Update



Imagine 100 MIT alumni and families all gathered together in Los Angeles under the MIT Hillel banner and you will begin to understand the excitement I am still exuding after last night. [Prof. Sherry Turkle](#) dazzled all the attendees at our third-ever "Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT... On the Road" event, and our first such gathering in California.



(Our second CA event quickly follows with Prof Turkle in San Francisco tonight.) Thanks to Ely '78, P'12 and Marsha P'12 Dahan for hosting in Southern California and to George Elbaum '59 and Mimi Jensen for hosting in Northern California!

Last month, we also brought [Prof. David Mindell](#) "On the Road" to Aventura, Florida at the home of Eugene '62 and Linda Witham Finkin. Current parents, alumni of many generations, and even some newly admitted pre-frosh all schmoozed, kibitzed, and traded MIT stories -- and continued to build a Jewish MIT community in South Florida.

It is with pride and gratitude that I address these crowds. Sharing the successes we've had impacting student growth on campus. Giving a taste of how students party, relax, learn, and seek. Imparting a sense of the new networks and communities being created by and for our Jewish students as they explore who they are as Jews and as human beings.

In Florida and California, I highlighted students and initiatives spanning the past year. Here are some stories I could just as easily have selected from the past month:



One-hundred eighty students partying at our first-annual Queen Esther's Ball in Walker Memorial on Purim, at a lip-



sync, drag/costume party co-sponsored with the [Rainbow Lounge](#), MIT's LGBT community. The evening also included a short discussion on the Book of Esther, seeing it as a story of hiding identities and "coming out". Graduate students, undergraduates, Sloan students, Israeli students, Jews and non-Jews all relaxed, sang, and danced together.



Four MIT student Israel advocates attended the [AIPAC Policy Conference](#) (pictured above), and at the student leadership dinner, they were brainstorming how to make "big" Israel events happen on campus. They actually left the dinner in order to find and talk to Michael Oren, Israel's ambassador to Washington, to convince him to come to campus. Unfortunately, he had already left the event... but they aren't giving up future hope of connecting! The motivation is high. Sophomore Jeff Sperling, a recent Birthright Israel alumnus, reflected from the Conference: "Birthright was a very personal experience. AIPAC has a very public and broad impact that I can see myself being involved in year after year. I was surprised at how complex the issues are and how many people are here supporting this."

Student bakers involved in [MIT Challah for Hunger](#) continued weekly baking and sales of challah to raise funds for genocide relief in Darfur through the American Jewish World Service's Sudan Relief and Advocacy Fund. The Nutella challah is particularly delicious...



With our next enewsletter scheduled for early April, best wishes to everyone for a happy and meaningful Passover!

L'shalom,
Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM '97

Torah from Tech



Our Torah this month is taught by Bob Ferrara '67, Treasurer of the MIT Hillel Board of Directors and Senior Director of Strategic Planning and Alumni Relations for MIT's Division of Student Life. Bob is quite active as 1967 Class President, co-chair of the 45th Reunion, and Past President of the MIT Club of Boston. He can be reached at rferrara@mit.edu.

It's OK to say "I don't know"

A year ago, several of us were asked to give brief talks in the MIT Chapel to complete this statement: "If there were one thing I would change at MIT, it would be..." I

had to think hard because MIT is a truly wonderful place, so there are a lot of things I would never want to change - the striving for excellence, the rigorous academics, the varied community, and much more. After much thought, I did settle on my candidate for the single thing to change here: that we at MIT be more accepting of the answer, "I don't know".

At a Tufts University lecture I attended some time ago, former President Bill Clinton owned up that he tries to say 'I don't know' at least once each and every day. Hmmm....if a world leader of this stature can say this, maybe I should, too. This began a line of thought on how we can use this admission positively in everyday life. Here are three very specific areas where admitting "I don't know" can really help.

- First – as a check to intellectual arrogance
- Second – as a prelude to science and honest inquiry
- Third – as an antidote for ideology and extremism

First – as a check to intellectual arrogance

The MIT Community has lots of smart people, and smart people can sometimes get ahead of themselves. But the mastery of one discipline hardly means we know everything. Indeed, expertise in one field does not necessarily extend to another. The old saw of "the more you know, the more

day school all my life, grown up in a Jewish neighborhood, and was looking for a Jewish community at MIT.

I love how close and tight-knit the MIT Hillel is. Our Hillel allows students to take an active role in what goes on. This is my third year on the Hillel student board (I've served as Secretary, Shabbat & Holidays VP, and now President). I am also a member of the Orthodox Minyan, helping with Seudah Shlishit (the third, afternoon meal on Shabbat afternoon), and have been on the MIT Students for Israel board. I mashgiach (over see the kosher aspects) for meals and events and probably spend far too much time sitting in the Hillel office chatting with the staff.

Hillel for me has morphed from the place I automatically went for the kosher food and religious services to a place where I can find most of my closest friends, can take on leadership roles, and can inspire others to get involved. As the president of Hillel, I have been learning great leadership and team skills and helping set goals for the year -- such as creating one Jewish community and providing multiple entry points through a variety of programming for potential members.

Something I deeply enjoy about MIT is how accepting the community is. The floor in my dorm contains a kosher kitchen and so we have a number of kosher-keeping Jews on the floor. My friends who are not Jewish make an effort to learn about my weird-sounding practices. But it also goes the other way around. I have learned a lot about them and their backgrounds, religions, and cultures that I had never been exposed to. We will randomly get into discussions about the differences and similarities in our religions, which I find both enjoyable and valuable.

I have found that the MIT Hillel community is just as accepting and open to different viewpoints. I have learned a lot from discussions and becoming friends with those whose opinions differ from mine. MIT Hillel has given me the opportunity to become a leader and teammate and to create bonding opportunities with friends. Hillel is part of why I love MIT: it has given me an amazing community to be a part of and contribute to.

you realize you don't know" captures this well. This is not a new observation. With help from Google, I tried tracing this thought back through history; the search led back as the famed Greek Philosopher Socrates, who some 24 centuries ago observed that "the first step to wisdom is acknowledging how little one knows." At its best, an ability to admit that we don't know can add a measure of humility to our conduct, and enable us to be more open, to listen, and to dialogue with others. And thus prepare us for real learning.

Second – as a prelude for real science and honest inquiry

As Rabbi Michelle Fisher noted to me in a conversation, science begins with the statement, "I don't know." You then can go on to ask, "What is the why, the how, the when" and all the other questions that flow from this basic admission. Scholars here and around the globe are very good at devising research to delve into such questions. We are blessed to be a part of an exceptional community that has the will, the talent, and the resources to do so. There are over 2,200 labs at MIT, and a large number of them are doing basic, leading edge research. They are not seeking the known. As Einstein put it, "If we knew what we were doing, it would not be research!"

Third – as an antidote for ideology and extremism

Ideologues and extremists are certain of truth. They don't need to admit "I don't know," since they know the answers, and can readily fit any trend or event in their intellectual architecture. The rest of us, the people of faith, are not so sure. (That's why our religions are called faiths). With the increasing polarization of political discourse and fragmentation of information sources, we could use more "I don't know". At the least, maybe we can suspend judgment long enough to understand what the other side is really concerned about. As social scientists have demonstrated, we are prone to "confirmation bias" – a tendency to fit observations into our particular world view and to selectively search and gather "facts" which support our point of view. Again, humility might be very helpful here.

Too bad it was not obvious in my youth that these three benefits – and many others - flowed so readily from the admission that "I don't know;" then again I didn't know. But it is never too late to start.

MIT Hillel's 2013 Annual Fund

Add to Jewish life @ MIT!

The generosity and annual support of alumni, parents, faculty, and friends contributes to a depth of Jewish life, experiences, and growth for MIT's Jewish community.

Do you like what you read and hear about Jewish life at MIT? Please help us create vibrant Jewish life at MIT, and lasting commitments to Judaism. [Add your name](#) to MIT Hillel's 2013 Donor Roll!

Tamid Initiative - Planned Giving @ MIT Hillel

Endowment and planned gifts truly sustain and build an organization. MIT Hillel is excited to help you create your personal Jewish legacy at MIT.

We invite alumni and friends who care deeply about Jewish life at MIT to consider joining the Institute's **Katharine Dexter McCormick (1904) Society (KDMS)** and be part of the **Tamid Initiative** by making a bequest to MIT, for the benefit of MIT Hillel. Your generosity will help MIT Hillel engage today's students, securing our Jewish future with confidence.

To inform us that you plan such a gift, download and send us a [pledge form](#).

MIT and MIT Hillel are eager to help you meet your objectives. For more information, please contact Danny Watt, MIT Hillel's Director of Development, [dwatt@mit.edu](mailto:d watt@mit.edu).

On the Hillel Calendar

Friday, March 15: Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT:

Susan Solomon, Ellen Swallow Richards Professor of Atmospheric Chemistry and Climate Science, will be speaking "On the Scientific and Societal



Thank you for supporting MIT Hillel!

Your generous support allows us to help keep Jewish life vibrant on the MIT campus!



Challenges of Climate Change". [RSVP here!](#)



Saturday, March 23-Sunday, March 30: MIT Spring Break

Monday night, March 25-Tuesday, April 2: Passover

With seders during Spring Break, if you know an MIT student who will be on campus and in need of a local seder, please have them contact us, hillel@mit.edu. To sign up for Kosher for Passover meals during the end of Passover (MIT community only, an @mit.edu email is required), please use [this form](#).

Further Spring Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT line-up:

April 12: David Kaiser, Germeshausen Professor of the History of Science Department Head, Program in Science, Technology and Society Senior Lecturer, Department of Physics

May 3: Richard "Dick" Wurtman, Cecil H. Green Distinguished Professor Emeritus

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